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ABSTRACT

As a part of the National Conference on Research in English cooperative research project concerning teacher behavior in the language arts, a literature survey was made to locate studies describing the behaviors of teachers during spelling instruction. The search was limited to studies reported during the period November 1966 to November 1971. Applying the selection criteria of the total project, no studies were found that clearly specified teaching behavior during spelling instruction. Spelling studies continue generally to be concerned with (1) the nature of the orthography, (2) learner variables, or (3) instructional method. While a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes effective spelling instruction must take into account these factors, teacher interaction with pupils during spelling instruction needs also to be accounted for. The effects of teaching behavior upon pupil achievement in spelling appears to be at least one factor warranting future study. (Author)

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REPORT OF THE LITERATURE SEARCH IN THE AREA OF TEACHING BEHAVIOR IN SPELLING INSTRUCTION

RICHARD E. HODGES

In order to place the preponderance of current spelling research in a common perspective, I would like to review briefly some of the underlying historical reasons that have served to determine both the nature and extent of such studies. In doing so, it is my aim to provide a context which helps to account for the dearth of spelling research that meets the criteria of the Cooperative Research Committee's search into the literature to identify effective teaching behaviors in the language arts.

Spelling instruction has a long-standing tradition in the American school curriculum. Since Colonial days, the task of mastering English spelling has been a formal, often formidable, part of the child's educational environment. Obviously, of course, an ability to spell correctly has consequences for accuracy in written communication, it is in this respect alone that much of the justification for the teaching of spelling has been claimed.

But, there are also other less obvious motives for the teaching of spelling, motives with social and psychological roots, that continue to persist as reasons why and how this subject is taught. Correct spelling, for example, is also commonly regarded as one indication of social status. Poor (or careless) spellers often are stigmatized both in and out of school. Indeed, social norms which undergird demands for good spelling are one of the principal reasons for the place of spelling instruction in the general school curriculum.

Another motive for spelling instruction rests upon an assumption that, except for occasional persons who are "Naturally gifted" spellers, learning to spell is a difficult and time-consuming exercise because English orthography is fundamentally an erratic and irrational system of writing. In short, learning to spell is <u>hard work</u>, necessitating drill and memory activities to ensure mastery. Drawing in part from nineteenth century faculty psychology, the seeming fact that learning to spell is hard work was even regarded as having its own rewards, since the drudgery of memorizing spelling words would ostensibly strengthen the general memory capabilities of the learner. The time-honored "spelling bee" and "spell down" were created to foster memory, and not necessarily to provide enjoyment in learning to spell.

Because of these two related beliefs that English writing is illogical and that spelling is difficult to learn, the bulk of investigations into spelling instruction

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have therefore generally centered on seeking more effective methods of teaching, some curriculum reorganization, and, to a small extent, on learner differences. With the onset of the scientific movement in education around the turn of the century, considerable interest was also generated in determining the functional vocabularies of writers, both children and adults, with the objective of reducing the memory task to the learner to only those words that would be useful for him to know.

Thus, the research focus of spelling up to the present time has principally involved an examination of methodological variables. In a fairly comprehensive review and critique of spelling research to the mid-1960's, Sherwin (1969) categorized some 200-plus selected studies in terms of 1) the role of rules in instruction; 2) the merits of focussing on "hard spots" in words; 3) syllabication as a spelling aid; 4) grouping words around some commond characteristic, (e.g. homonyms); 5) the "list" method versus the "context" method (parenthetically, it is interesting to note that this issue has recently been raised again as a major spelling "problem"; see Wallace, 1972) 6) the "test-study" method versus the "study-test" method; 7) the effects of games, flashcards, eye movements, and proofreading practice upon spelling achievement; 8) motivation in spelling achievement; and 9) individualizing instruction, among the principal categorizations.

It has only been in the past few years, however, that investigations have been undertaken of the earlier mentioned premises about the orthography which have been implicit in the majority of spelling research. Generated out of linguistic theory, these studies have seriously strained conventional beliefs about the nature and function of the writing system. (Chomsky and Halle, 1968; Hanna, et al, 1966, Venezky and Weir, 1967).

Yet, despite the implications these studies have for both the content and the method of spelling instruction, there continues to be a flow of reports of spelling research which could be categorized in much the same manner that Sherwin employed in his book. However, it is not our purpose here to survey the history of spelling research. This brief overview has been intended to illuminate the assumptions which have guided most such research and which, in large measure, still continue to do.

As part of the NCRE Cooperative Research Project, a search was made of the spelling research literature published during the period 1960-71 to locate studies in which were explicitly described teaching behaviors during spelling instruction. As others in symposium have already indicated, the criteria employed in making this search were stringent. When these criteria are coupled with the historical dimensions of spelling research, it is not surprising to find that the basis of spelling studies

reported during this period largely continue the heritage which I briefly outlined. That effective spelling instruction could be a function of teaching behavior, as specified in this search, was virtually unstudied.

Our search procedures were as follows:

For the period November 1966 through December 1971, a detailed search was made of the major sources which might contain reports or listings of spelling research. These sources included The Education Index, the ERIC catalogs, Psychological Abstracts, The Review of Educational Research, Dissertation Abstracts, AERA journals, NCTE research reviews, and the volumes Mirrors of Behavior, as well as The Classroom Interaction Newsletter, for studies of teacher-pupil interaction during spelling instruction. A list of titles or other promising leads was compiled. Each such study or its abstract was read to ascertain the relevance of the research in respect to the criteria being used in the overall NCRE Cooperative Research literature search. In no case was there record to any evidence of the effects of teaching behavior in spelling instruction.

Obviously, there is a wealth of material on teacher behavior. But very little of this research appears to be directly concerned with the teaching of a particular subject. The studies that have been done are mainly concerned with pupil-teacher interactions with subject matter viewed as just one vehicle through which this interaction may occur. There is clearly also a great amount of literature in which certain teaching behaviors are recommended, but in no instance were these recommendations grounded in emperical evidence.

A comprehensive understanding of spelling instruction must draw upon linguistic, psychological, and instructional theory, taking into account the nature of the writing system, the nature of the learner, and methodologies that are appropriate in light of both of these factors. It is to state the obvious that knowledge of a subject and of the student are basic ingredients in making educational decisions. It is apparently less obvious that such decisions can be compromised by the consequences of teacher-pupil interactions, in that no evidence is available that serves to identify effective teaching behaviors in the teaching of spelling.

At the least, this literature search has revealed what appears to be a virtually untapped area for research. The effects of teaching behavior upon pupil achievement in spelling is a dimensionoof the larger task of identifying effective teaching in the language arts that would seem to warrant careful study.

Chomsky, Noam and Halle, Morris. The Sound Pattern of English. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

Hanna, Paul R., Hanna, Jean., Hodges, Richard E., and Rudorf, Erwin H. Phoneme--Grapheme Correspondences as Cues to Spelling Improvement. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, U.S. Office of Education, 1966.

Sherwin, J. Stephen. Four Problems in Teaching English: A Critique of Research. Scranton, Pennsylvania: International/NCTE, 1969.

Venezky, Richard and Weir, Ruth. A Study of Selected Spelling-to-Sound Correspondence Patterns. Stanford, California: U.S.O.E. Cooperative Research No. 3090, 1967.

Wallace, Eunice Ewer, et al. "Let's Take Another Look", Elementary English, 49 (December 1972). 1223--1227.

AERA ABSTRACT: SPELLING

As a part of the NCPE cooperative research project concerning teacher behavior in the language arts, a literature survey was made to locate studies describing the behaviors of teachers during spelling instruction. The search was limited to studies reported during the period November, 1966 to November, 1971. Applying the selection criteria of the total project, no studies were found that clearly specified teaching behavior during spelling instruction. Spelling studies continue generally to be concerned with 1) the nature of the orthography, 2) learner variables, or 3) instructional method. While a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes effective spelling instruction must take into account these factors, teacher interaction with pupils during spelling instruction needs also to be accounted for. The effects of teaching behavior upon pupil achievement in spelling appears to be at least one factor warranting future study.

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